

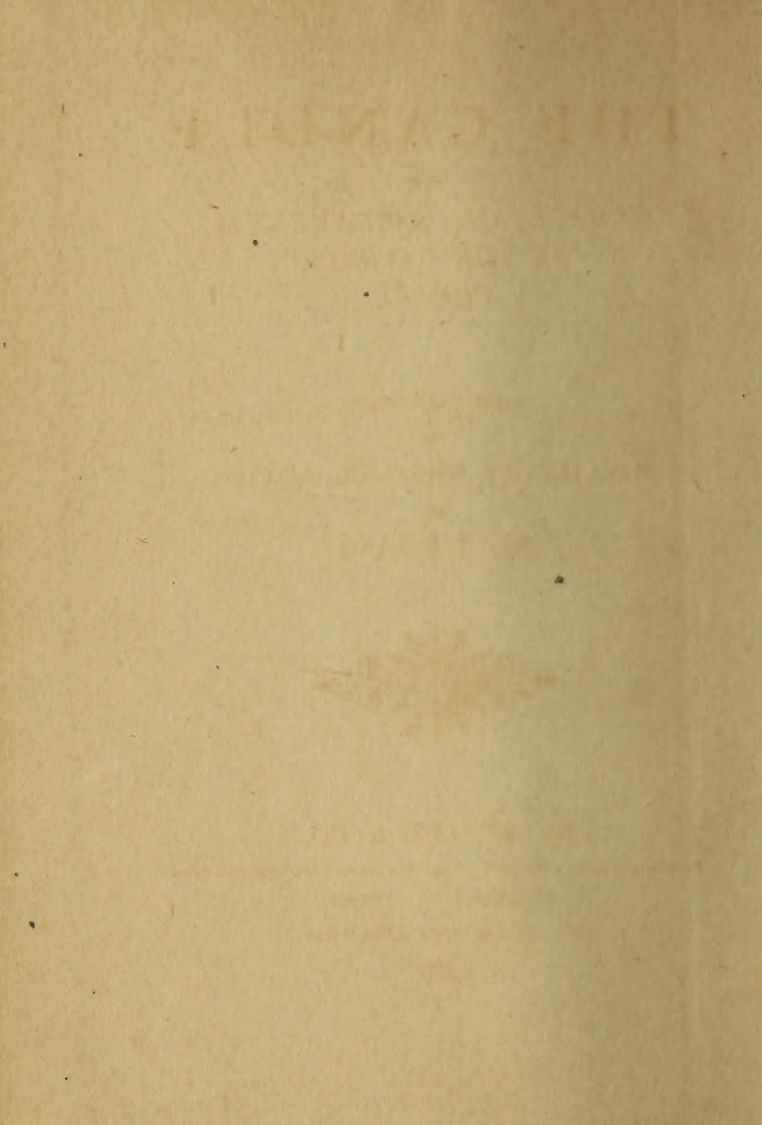
THE CANDLE
AS A
SYMBOL AND SACRAMENTAL
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

REV. HENRY THEILER, S. O. CIST.

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AS A

*SYMBOL AND SACRAMENTAL
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CHURCH*

FROM THE GERMAN

OF

REV. HENRY THEILER, S.O.CIST.

BY

REV. J. F. LANG



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Reverende in Christo Confrater:

Opusculum (the candle as a symbol and sacramental in the Catholic Church) a te summo cum studio confectum, plane approbo: Deumque precor ut in mentibus fidelium devotionem excitet foveatque, atque ita fructus faciat quos in concinnando tractatu ipse auctor intendit.

Datum in monasterio Bornhemiensi (Belgio), 20 Augusti, 1906.

Fr. Amedeus de Bie,

Abbas Gen. Ord. Cist.

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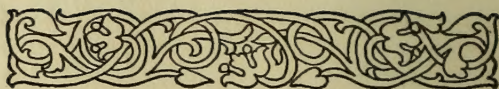
Ratisbon, 13th November, 1906.

*The Cathedral Chapter,
See vacant.*

Dr. P. Kagerer,

Vicar Capitular.

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FOREWORD

THE object of this booklet is to show the Catholic Christian the important significance of candles in the Church and at divine service, and to instruct him upon the blissful effects in which he may share through blessed candles. It is indeed desirable that the faithful realize the beautiful idea fulfilled in the candles, and on the other hand it were to be regretted if many Christians could not at any time of their life give answer to the question, "What significance has the Sanctuary light (Ewige Licht), and what signify the burning candles upon our altars?" And how many a pious and elevating thought will these burning candles awaken in the

soul when their rich and ideal significance is understood!

And, too, the blessed candles will be productive of a more wholesome use when it is known how many graces they may be the means of obtaining for us. These are the thoughts that guided us in preparing this booklet. May it be conducive to God's honor and to the salvation of souls.

THE AUTHOR.





PART I

LIGHT AS A SYMBOL

CHAPTER I

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIGHT IN THE NATURAL ORDER AND FOR MANKIND

AMONG the things which God has called into being there are few which give pleasure and helps to man so much as light. Light is beautiful and helpful. It illumines and clarifies all visible creation, it gives warmth and causes life and fruitfulness. Cleanly as it is, its effects tend towards cleanliness. Without light, nature would be without life, dark and

gloomy, dismal and invisible to the human eye. It exercises great influence upon the humor and intellect of man; it tends to make him happy and cheerful. When God created the world He first called light into being. "And God said, Be light made. And light was made. And God saw the light that it was good." (Gen. i. 3, 4.) And man too realized that the light is good. For the sake of the many splendid qualifications of this noble creature he points out many intellectual gifts by the simple word "light." He speaks, for instance, of the light of reason, the light of knowledge, the light of faith, the light of grace. Men who have distinguished themselves by wisdom, knowledge, virtue, are called the lights of history, or lights of their century. And Israel called the Messias, the promised redeemer and king, the conqueror of nations, — styled him by the single and simple word, — light. "Arise," says the

prophet Isaias, "be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come." (Is. lx. 1.) The Divine Redeemer styled Himself a light, saying, "I am the light of the world." (John viii. 12.) He is the light in a superlative degree. In Him every thing is light, His doctrine, His holy deeds, His holy life. And after Him, all who hear and obey His words, who follow His holy example of virtue, in a word, all who live after His holy example, will be called "the children of light," in contradistinction to those who follow the spirit of the world, of sin and of evil, and are called the children of the world. "He that followeth me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.) Thus spoke our Divine Lord; therefore the happiness of Heaven in which the children of light are to be forever united with Christ is properly called the "Eternal light."

As history tells us, mankind, in a measure, saw in light something almost

supernatural, as though coming from another world, and therefore it seemed to them as specially created to reflect honor and submission to the Deity. We are told that the heathen Romans held public processions bearing torchlights in honor of their gods. In many cases, though, the heathen peoples so erred that they looked upon the light as a deity; for instance, the people of India worshiped the sun. To the people of Persia the sun was the counterpart of their God Ormuzd, and they also worshiped the sun. The Greeks served a god they called Phœbus, signifying illumination, streaming with rays of light. We find the same among other pagan nations.

An incomparably better application of the light was found, however, in Judaism, who instead of using it in the service of idols, employed it as a means of showing honor and worship to the true God. In the sanctuary of their temple, there burned

day and night the light of the golden chandelier, upon which rested seven lamps. These were ignited from the fires of the altar of burnt offerings, and were prepared every morning and filled every evening by the priests of the temple with purest olive oil. God Himself commanded the Sons of Israel through Moses concerning the seven-branched chandelier: "to bring the finest and cleanest oil of olives to furnish the lamps continually, without the veil of the testimony in the tabernacle of the testimony . . . upon the most pure candlestick before the Lord continually." (Levit. xxiv. 2, 4.) The continuously burning seven-branched chandelier marked the temple as the dwelling of God and the place of His presence, rich in graces, and it was remindful too of God, who in the book of Wisdom is called "eternal light." (vii. 26.)

The most expressive, worthy, and manifold application, however, of the light has

been found in Christianity. Holy Church makes use of it preferredly as a symbol, and then also as a sacramental. In the sequence we will consider in detail the symbolic meaning of light, and then treat of light as a sacramental.





CHAPTER II

THE SYMBOLISM OF LIGHT, IN GENERAL

WE speak of a symbolism of light. What does this mean? The primary object relating to light in its composition consists in illuminating darkness. Light fulfils this object too in divine service. But this is not the only object for which light serves at divine service. The Catholic Christian can readily convince himself that day after day, in broad daylight, at divine service, candles are burning on the altar. Obviously, light plainly subserves some other purpose. It is a symbol, has a symbolic meaning; it symbolizes religious truths. In every-day life one

speaks of ideal pictures, of symbols. For example, the lily is a symbol of the virtue of purity. Whilst the lily blends within itself the pretty white with gentle and tasteful beauty and tenderness, it possesses advantages which in a higher sense denote the virtue of purity. The violet, a rather unattractive floweret, living in gentle hiding, exhaling from its purple calyx a charming perfume, unwittingly reminds one of the virtue of humility. It is therefore an appropriate symbol of this virtue. Most everybody, no doubt, has experienced that as the color of white raises one's moods to cheerfulness, so black awakens an idea of seriousness. It is, therefore, not a whim, but it is rather in the nature of things, that people look upon the color of white as a symbol of joy, and upon that of black as a symbol of sorrow.

Just so with the symbol of light. As light is clean and pretty, charming and delicate, giving illumination and warmth,

is encouraging and refreshing, it becomes by these splendid preferments the most appropriate symbol of cleanliness and beauty, of the clearness and splendor of the invisible world, of spirituality and of grace.

That light has always possessed, in addition to its natural significance, a higher meaning, we clearly learn from the testimonials of the earliest centuries. We have proofs that light possessed symbolic meanings in the second and third centuries. Thus we find in the picture works of the catacombs, as in the statistics upon the celebration of divine service, in most ancient times, lamps and wax candles that were certainly not used exclusively for the lighting of dark places. We are traditionally informed that in the burial of the holy Bishop and martyr Cyprian (died, 258), many wax candles and torches were borne in the procession. This occurred to heighten the solemnity, and out of a

special religious respect, and by no means to enlighten the darkness of night. In the fourth and fifth centuries the important significance of light is certified to by numerous testimonials. St. Gregory of Nyssa (died, 395) writes of his sister Makrina, that not a small number, bearing wax candles, preceded the funeral bier. St. Prudentius (died, 405) and St. Paulinus of Nola (died, 431) relate that a very great number of lights were burned in the churches day and night, and this not only at particular or especial ceremonies; and they speak of this as though of an ancient custom. St. Jerome in his defense against Vigilantius points clearly and plainly to the symbolic meaning of lights. Whilst this heretic ridiculed the Christians because they lighted numerous candles in their churches during bright sunlight, the holy Doctor of the Church replied to him: "In all the churches of the Orient, whilst the gospel is read, in broad daylight,

candles are lighted, not at all to banish darkness, but in order to give, by some outward sign, an expression of joy." And as in the course of centuries divine services became more elaborate, light as a symbol grew in importance and greater significance.





CHAPTER III

THE MATERIAL CONSTITUTING LIGHTS IN CHURCH USE

As the lights used in divine service symbolize great truths, it is quite in order that their ingredients should be pure. Holy Church in her precaution for the worthy celebration of divine worship has not overlooked this point. From the years of antiquity she has used in all church functions, especially where the object of lights was of a symbolic character, pure beeswax and olive oil.

Wax candles are so strictly prescribed that even in poor churches no exception

may be made. It is therefore strictly forbidden to burn, for instance at Holy Mass, candles made of paraffine, stearine, tallow, or to mix such ingredients with wax. In case of necessity, however, tallow or stearine candles may be used. Only because of some local circumstances has the Church permitted the missionaries of Oceanica, when it becomes impossible for them to procure wax, either to use oil light or to burn candles made of purified fish oil, or to say Mass without any light.

When the object of light is not of a symbolic, but of a merely practical nature, for instance for illumination in darkness, or for decoration, then the Bishop may permit the use of tallow, stearine, or paraffine candles. Likewise is it forbidden to use gas in addition to wax candles upon the altar, to procure a grand illumination. In case of necessity, however, when olive oil cannot be procured, if deemed prudent,

and by the Bishop's consent, oil made of plants, or of fruits, or even petroleum, is tolerated.

Why, we may well ask, do wax and olive oil especially commend themselves as ingredients of lights for the use of the altar? Primarily because of their purity, secondly because of the truths which they idealize. Wax is the purest product of the animal kingdom that can be conformed into lights. It is the busy bee, which has been looked upon since the days of antiquity as a symbol of original purity, that gathers the wax from the pure and sweetly perfumed flowers and blossoms. This pure wax points to the most holy manhood of the Divine Savior, the blessed fruit of the womb of the purest, and full of the sweetest of graces and virtues, — the Virgin mother. The brilliant flame in its charming glow points to His divinity; the taper or candle symbolizes His human nature; the wick hidden in the wax points to His

holy soul; the wax itself denotes His virginal person.

As wax is the purest product of the animal kingdom that can be transformed into light, so is olive oil the purest product of nature's plant that can be used for light. Even in the old testament the lamps of the seven-armed chandelier in the sanctuary of the temple were kept aglow with olive oil. And, too, olive oil in the Old Law symbolized the spirit and power of God. For this reason the priests, kings, and prophets were anointed with oil, and in this manner ordained for their office, empowered and endowed with dignity. The oil therefore points to the Divine Savior, who, in the highest sense, is priest, king, and prophet. He is the real Christ, the anointed, and He is anointed not only with oil, but according to the words of St. Paul: "God anointed Him, with the Holy Ghost and with power." (Acts x. 38.) St. Bernard says olive oil is

useful as light, food, and medicine. Precisely these qualities make oil an appropriate symbol of our Divine Savior, who dwells in our midst in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. As the light shimmers mildly and softly, nourished by olive oil, so is the Eucharistic Savior to us mildness and kindness personified. And as the oil softly flows, so the sacramental graces gently pour upon the soul; as oil permeates the body, so does grace enter into the soul of the communicant, that he can well say with the apostle Paul, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii. 20.) As a medicine, oil is soothing and healing, qualities that likewise show it to be a beautiful symbol of the Divine Savior, who in this Most Holy Sacrament is a heavenly balm to our soul. The very thought of the God man humiliating Himself in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar soothes the burning wounds of pride and humbles the vanity of the

soul of the believing Christian. Or when hatred and enmity harden the human heart and make it unsympathetic, then again this heavenly balm softens the hardened hearts, softens them to reconciliation and peace. And when this remedy strengthens and fills the soul, how quickly the wounds made by venial sin are healed, and how quickly evil desires are vanquished, and love for God supersedes them. Thus oil is a striking symbol of the Savior dwelling in our midst under the appearance of bread.

This beautiful and ideal symbol of wax and olive oil sufficiently explains why the Church has prescribed these particular substances for lighting purposes. We will briefly consider the elevating thoughts which the lights in the house of God and in the celebration of her holy mysteries should awaken in our soul.





CHAPTER IV

SYMBOLISM OF THE SANCTUARY LIGHT

WHEN the Catholic enters his church his eye is confronted with the light of the sanctuary lamp. From the middle of the thirteenth century it has been a universal law, that before the tabernacle, in which the Most Holy is preserved, at least one lamp must be burning day and night. As in the temple of Jerusalem the seven-branched chandelier always burned in God's presence, so glimmers in our houses of worship, never ending, the "everlasting light." Its subdued reflection tells us that the Divine Redeemer is present upon the altar. "Indeed the Lord is in this place." (Gen. xxviii. 16.) He is "the

true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world." (John 9.) Consequently our Divine Lord could say of Himself, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.)

The sanctuary lamp directs us to the heavenly doctrine and the Savior's example in divine virtue, which, like a supernatural sunlight, enlightened the darkness of paganism. It points to the streams of light in grace, which from the most holy sacrament flow upon all mankind. It proclaims at the same time the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias: "Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and

kings in the brightness of thy rising.” (Is. lx. 1-4.) Thus is the gleaming and glimmering of the sanctuary light a forerunner of the joyous message that the glory of the Lord has risen upon us, that the Divine Savior in His glorified and transfigured body dwells among us, and by His teaching, His example, His grace, is our light in the darkness of this world. And as the sanctuary light is bright by day and by night, and as the watchful eye of the Savior is hovering over the Christian parish, in the day and in the night, should not the lambs of His flock think of Him, not abandon nor offend Him, nor wander after the joys of the world? The Savior watches over all in unselfish love and none escapes His all-seeing eye. “Behold He shall neither slumber nor sleep, that keepeth Israel.” (Ps. cxx. 4.) Thus is the sanctuary light an ideal picture of the protecting love of our Lord and Savior, — the eye of His providential care over

us. As this lamp continually burns and enlightens, so a strong and unshaken hope enlivens us, in believing that the Divine Savior will remain with us to the end of the world; does not He say, "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.) He is "the bright and morning star." (Apoc. xxii. 16.) Cardinal Wiseman beautifully expresses himself upon the symbolic significance of the sanctuary light in saying: "Burning in darkness, quiet and lonely in the night, glaring in the noonday sun, and during the crowded attendance at divine service, a presentation of submission which is offered the Lord of Lords in His earthly dwelling, and the uninterrupted homage and adoration which the heart should consecrate to Him for the mercy that endureth forever. This watchful lamp seems to fulfil our obligation, to idealize our love, always glowing, streaming forth in joyful devotion. It is likewise

a symbol of the permanent submission on the part of the heavenly choirs, who, with a never closed eye nor a restful tongue, watch and praise before the tabernacle as before the throne of the lamb."

The Catholic can readily convince himself day by day, as often as Holy Mass is offered, that candles are ablaze upon the altar. We will treat briefly of their deeply fixed significance.





CHAPTER V

THE SYMBOLISM OF CANDLES IN CONNECTION WITH THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

THE following are regulations of the Church concerning the use of candles at Holy Mass: At Low Mass two candles shall burn, and only in case of necessity is one candle sufficient. Only by special permission of the Holy See may Mass be offered without lights. All clergymen, even prelates, if they have not received episcopal consecration, are allowed to use only two candles at a Low Mass. The Bishop is permitted, at least on feast days, to use four candles at a Low Mass. At a Solemn High Mass at least six candles shall be

lighted; more than six candles are permitted, but no particular power shall be ascribed to any specified number. At High Mass, or at a Requiem High Mass, at least four candles must be lighted. When the Bishop pontificates in his own diocese seven candles shall be lighted on the altar. If the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in the ciborium, at least six candles shall be in use, and if exposed in the monstrance, at least twelve candles shall be lighted.

Let us examine somewhat in detail the meaning of candles used in the celebration of Holy Mass. The thought of an offering is principally signified by the burning lights. In Holy Mass our Divine Lord offers Himself in an unbloody and mysterious manner through the ministry of the priest. At the consecration He descends upon the altar to offer in an unbloody manner the sacrifice which He offered upon the cross by spilling His blood. It was love that prevailed upon

our Lord to sacrifice Himself for us upon the cross, and so it is love again that causes Him, day by day, to the end of time, to offer Himself to the Heavenly Father, for our sake, upon our altars. Could this burning love of self-sacrifice be better symbolized than in the flame of the candle, which consumes and annihilates the wax? And the subdued rays that pass from the flame of the taper, how strikingly they idealize the graces flowing from the most holy sacrifice upon the faithful. Pope Innocent III used these significant words: "Upon the sides of the altar are placed two candlesticks bearing two lighted candles, which express the great joys of the nations, the Jews and Pagans, over the birth of Christ. The angel said to the shepherds: 'I bring you great joy.' The light upon the candlestick, however, signifies the faith of the people; the prophet said to the Jewish people: 'Arise and be enlightened, O Jerusalem: for thy light

is come.' (Is. lx. 1.) To the heathen nations, however, the apostle said: 'For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord' (Eph. v. 8), for at the birth of Christ there appeared to the wise men a new star in accord with the prophecy of Balaam." And thus the candles at Holy Mass symbolize the true light, without which, even in broad daylight, we would walk in darkness.

The larger number of candles at a Solemn High Mass serves to heighten the splendor of the ceremony. In addition to this, the numerous burning lights are quite adapted to awaken in the faithful a soul-inspiring disposition, because their mild and mysterious glitter pours out rays of life, of joy, of hope and consolation, throughout the edifice and upon the divine services as well.

The burning lights before the Blessed Sacrament, when exposed, are an expression of submission and of worship toward

Christ. It is but proper, therefore, that many candles should be burning on such an occasion, because these numerous flames are like so many tongues proclaiming that here is enthroned "the true light" (John i. 19), the "light of light." All these lights that consume themselves in the worship and glorifying of the one true light, at the same time admonish the faithful of a cheerful and loving indebtedness to the Divine Lord, and their glimmer and brightness are likewise an admonition to love light more than darkness.

The seven candles used when the Bishop pontificates in his own diocese denote the seven golden lamps which St. John saw in Revelation: "I saw seven golden candlesticks: And in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like to the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle" (Apoc. i. 12-14), meaning one clad in the garments of a

high priest. This high priest whom St. John saw is Christ, the transfigured high priest, who continuously gives to holy Church through the Holy Ghost and His seven gifts, light and life. The Bishop is, in his diocese, the visible representative of Jesus Christ, the invisible high priest. In an especial manner, however, does the Bishop appear, on the occasion of the celebration of the sacrifice, as the vicegerent of the Divine Savior, and the seven candles symbolize the parishes of his diocese, which shine in the light coming from Christ during the sacrificial offering.

In approaching the altar the Bishop is preceded by two candle bearers, and incense. In this ceremony Pope Innocent III finds the following mystic meaning: "Two candles and incense are borne before the Bishop because the law and the prophets prophesied, through the Psalms, the coming of Christ, as He Himself testifies when He says: 'All things must need be

fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.' (Luke xxiv. 44.) The two candles therefore idealize the law of Moses and the prophets. The Psalmist also compares the law to a light when he says: 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths.' (Ps. cxxiii. 105.) In most pontifical celebrations a special wax candle is carried preceding the Bishop. This is a special idealism of the Bishop's dignity, and is remindful that the Bishop is as a light placed upon a candlestick."

As has been stated, lights were used during the reading of the gospel in the early Christian centuries. And to-day at Solemn High Mass two acolytes bear burning candles, standing at each side of the book while the gospel is sung. The gospel is the word of God and represents the person of Christ. Christ speaks to us through it by the mouth of the deacon. In the

gospel our Lord appears to us preeminently as the Light of the World. His divine teaching illumines the darkness of this world like a spiritual sunlight. The lights therefore should be to us a symbol of the respect and adoration we owe to Him. The word "gospel" signifies a message of joy, and so should the burning candles, as St. Jerome tells us, bring expression to our joy over the great blessing that has come to us in being called to share in the true faith.

In some dioceses the beautiful custom prevails of burning a third wax taper during the consecration, to remind us that our Divine Lord is present upon the altar and calls upon the faithful to offer Him adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. This candle is not extinguished until after the communion of priest and people. Likewise is such a candle burning during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and during the distribution of Holy Communion.

At Solemn High Masses the acolytes bear two, four, six, eight, or more candles during the elevation, according to the rank of the feast. On feast-days the many candles are to us an encouragement to spiritual joy and to praise God; on penitential occasions, however, the candles seemingly called upon us in the words of St. Paul: "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Rom. xiii. 12.)

As darkness is a fitting symbol of sin, so is light a striking symbol of grace. Holy Church has therefore wisely ordained that in the ministration of the Holy Sacraments, comparable to the seven rays of grace, candles should be made use of.





CHAPTER VI

THE SYMBOLISM OF LIGHTS IN CONNECTION WITH THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

THE holy apostle writes in his letter to the Ephesians: "You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord." (Eph. v. 8.) It is holy baptism that expels from the soul the darkness of sin, and kindles therein the light of grace and of faith. For this reason this holy sacrament was looked upon even in the early times of Christianity as an inward illumination of man. This enlightenment was outwardly expressed by the bearing of candles by the newly baptized, whilst they moved in procession from the baptismal font into the church. Meanwhile they sang the litany, and when the words

“Lamb of God” were being pronounced they lighted the candles as a sign that they had become light through the sacrificed Lamb of God. Relative to these candles St. Gregory of Nazianzen in one of his beautiful homilies addresses the candidates for baptism: “The candle which you will ignite, symbolizes the light which you will bear in another world with a soul of virginal purity, bearing burning lamps of faith when you go to meet the heavenly bridegroom.” St. Jerome admirably says: “How can it seem strange to you that we represent to the candidate for baptism, where we vow to Christ an eternal loyalty, our invisible Lord under the simile of a candle, after He had represented Himself to His first followers under the representation of a shining star, and manifested Himself to His faithful apostles on the mount in light and splendor?” St. Charles Borromeo sees in the lighted candle, which is handed to the one being baptized, a pic-

ture of the three divine virtues, infused in baptism, namely, in the light he sees faith, love in its warmth, and hope in the candle that is held upward toward heaven. The light of faith shall illumine him upon the dark pathway in his pilgrimage toward heaven, hope shall strengthen him in his battle against the enemy of salvation, and charity shall make him a loyal observer of the commandments of God. When, therefore, the priest hands a burning candle to the one being baptized, he unites with this act the admonition to keep his baptism without blame, to observe the commandments of God, that when our Lord shall come to his nuptials he may go forth to meet Him.

No sacrament bears such great dignity as the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Holy Church therefore shows it such preferment, and indeed not the less so than that she subordinates the candle in its special service. Of the sanctuary lamp

mention has already been made, and we then pointed out that Holy Church surrounds the Blessed Sacrament with lights during its exposition. Even in a visit to the sick with the Holy Eucharist, a light must be carried ahead, enclosed in glass as a protection against the winds. Only in case of necessity, or when there is cause of fear of derision by unbelievers, may the Most Holy be carried to the sick without a light. Light in the service of the Blessed Sacrament is for its praise, and a mark of submission to it. It likewise points to the words of our Savior: "I am come a light into the world; that whosoever believeth in me may not remain in darkness." (John xii. 46.) Of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, is written in Revelation: "For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof." (Apoc. xxi. 23.) And we can say the same of our church edifices. Their real light is the Lamb of God that is enshrined upon the altar, to

which all the faithful turn, as the sunflower turns toward the sun.

During the administration of Extreme Unction two wax candles are burning to show forth the dignity of this holy sacrament and the respect due to it.

As our Divine Savior calls Himself the light, and is often referred to in Sacred Scripture as the light, it is an ideal ceremony when they who in a special manner dedicate themselves to the service of the Lord symbolize their renunciation in His favor by a burning candle. Bearing a burning taper, they who receive any holy order advance before the Bishop, to signify that as children of light they are filled with a lively faith. At the offertory the ordained bring their candles to the Bishop to signify that they have given themselves to God, for in truth they have made of themselves a precious offering to Christ, "the shepherd and bishop of their souls" (1 Peter ii. 25), and the burning

candle is only a symbol of their offering. The giving up of himself to God, of every servant of Holy Church, consists in offering himself in her service, and therein to be consumed, but always in obedience and in submission to the Bishop. This is beautifully expressed when the ordained kisses not only the candle but also the Bishop's ring. The burning candle is also remindful of the obligation assumed, "to give testimony of the light" (John i. 7), and to let his "light shine before men" (Matt. v. 16), and to be "a burning and shining light" (John v. 35).

At the consecration of a bishop the one to be consecrated brings to the consecrating Bishop two large lighted wax candles. As is the life of the priest so too is the life of the Bishop one of sacrifice, and as the light consumes itself so too does the fervently devoted Bishop, for the welfare of his diocese. But by the two large candles is indicated that his light must give still more luster than that of the priest.



CHAPTER VII

THE SYMBOLISM OF LIGHT IN VARIOUS RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

HOLY Church on many solemn occasions places a burning light into the hands of her members, partly to designate them as children of light, and partly to remind them that the following of Christ demands from them a life of sacrifice. Thus, for instance, with the first communicant. Without any merit on his part and without his cooperation the burning candle was placed for him in holy baptism. At that time the sponsors received it in his name. They too, in his name, made the baptismal vows. In the meantime the child advanced in its years; in the catechetical

instructions it learns the truths of holy religion, and is now enabled to give account of its faith on its own behalf. The child does this by renewing the baptismal vows, and thus shows that it has kept the faith and has remained a child of light. The burning candle lends to this thought a conforming expression. Like the prudent virgins with burning lamps who went to meet the bridegroom, so goes the first communicant with a burning candle to meet the bridegroom of his soul. "O sacred Banquet, wherein Christ is received; the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and the pledge of future glory is given unto us." In truth, at this heavenly banquet, in which the Divine Savior, this true light, that enlightens every man, so intimately unites himself with the soul of the happy communicant, this one so really becomes a child of light. The burning candle tells him this, and at the same time it is an

admonition to him never to lose sanctifying grace through mortal sin.

In some places it is customary for the bridal couple when approaching the altar to bear a burning candle. Who but thinks on this occasion of the words of the apostle which he spoke relative to the holy sacrament of matrimony: "This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church." (Eph. v. 32.) The Christian couple will therefore say with holy Tobias: "For we are the children of saints and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God." (Tob. viii. 5.) Furthermore, faith tells them that they are in need of the blessing of the church, that they may fulfil the duties of their state in a manner pleasing to God. It must of course be their aim, for the salvation of their soul and for the honor of God, to lead a good life. To them are applicable also the words of St. Peter: "But you are a chosen generation, . . . a

holy nation, that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." (1. Peter ii. 9.) The burning candle accordingly symbolizes the faith of the bridal twain and reminds them of their duty, to testify their faith by good works, works of light.

In many dioceses the beautiful custom obtains that the Christian mother, following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, makes her first visit from home after childbirth, to the house of God, there to receive the blessing of the Church and to thank God for the graces He has bestowed, and to thank Him for the dear infant which in holy baptism became a child of God and a temple of the Holy Ghost. On this occasion Holy Church places in the mother's hand a burning candle, to remind her that she guide her child by the light of Christian faith, and by a pious and edifying life, on the way to heaven.

At the blessing of an abbot he brings to the Bishop, after the offertory of the Mass, two large burning wax candles as an offering, and he signifies by this that by teaching and by good example he will lead and guide his subjects. The benediction of an abbess carries with its ceremony this same significance.

Nuns in making their vows likewise bring to the Bishop at the offertory a burning candle. This is a beautiful symbol of the giving of themselves to Christ, and of their love for Him,—the heavenly bridegroom.

In some places it is customary for the young levite approaching the altar to say his first Mass, to bear a lighted candle, as a symbol of his dedication of self with joy and faith to the service of the Divine Savior. It indicates to him how he should be consumed in the service of God and, in accord with the words of the holy apostle Paul, “be an example of the faithful in

word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity." (Tim. iv. 12.)

The burning light which is placed in the hand of the dying is a symbol of Christ, whom the departing goes to meet, and also of his lively faith in Christ. If the departing pilgrim have erred on life's pathway, he denied not, however, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but believed, nor allowed the light of faith to become extinguished.

As the affiliation with Christ in holy baptism, and the intimate relation with Him in holy orders and vows, is symbolized by bearing a light, so does severance from Christ and the Church receive a corresponding expression by extinguishing the lights. When a member of the Church is excluded from its community, the Bishop and his assistants, as a sign of this expulsion, throw their candles upon the floor. His light is extinguished and cast away, and shall not shine. If in earlier days such who were

excluded from communion with the Church became reconciled to her, the candle is again placed in their hand and they are told, Christ will enlighten you. If they were received back, the ceremony occurred on Holy Thursday. As the candle at baptism, so on this occasion, it is lighted at the words "Lamb of God," in the litany of the Saints, to indicate that they are again become light in Christ.

The candle is used likewise in many blessings and ordinations of the Church.





CHAPTER VIII

THE SYMBOLISM OF CANDLES AS USED BY THE CHURCH AT BLESSINGS AND ORDINA- TIONS

CANDLES must be burned during the blessings that occur at the altars and in connection with Holy Mass. At least one wax candle shall burn when a solemn blessing takes place in the Church or Sacristy, outside of Holy Mass. If the blessing be not of a solemn nature, then it is not an ordinance, but it is becoming that at least one candle be lighted. The candle at blessings signifies the manifold graces that are imparted through the objects that are blest.

We have noted that persons who in a special manner dedicate themselves to God bear a burning candle when approaching the altar. A representation of this is found in the consecration of a church; whilst the Bishop is performing the ceremony, near the twelve crosses surrounding the walls are twelve burning candles, typifying the twelve apostles, illumined from the Cross to bring mankind to the knowledge and love of God. These twelve candles are relighted during Mass and vespers on the yearly anniversary of the dedication.

In dedicating an altar the Bishop lights five wax candles of a cruciform shape. While these are burning the choir sings

Come Holy Ghost, Creator, come, from Thy
bright heavenly throne,
Come take possession of our souls, and make
them all Thine own.

These burning candles symbolize the glowing offering of love which our Divine Lord

offered in the bloody sacrifice upon the altar of the cross, and which He renews upon our altars in an unbloody manner in unity with the Holy Ghost, who, like a divine fire, makes the gifts offered like to the completeness of a burnt sacrifice. Another symbolic meaning derives when we consider the altar as a representation of Christ. Then the five wax candles on the corners and center of the altar are a reminder of the five wounds of the crucified Savior. The following thought is also expressed in this ceremony: Christ is the light of the world, and from Him the light goes forth to the four points of the compass, out upon the world.

At the blessing of a cemetery five crosses are erected, and upon each one, three wax candles are placed. These point to Christ, who died once upon the cross, now dies no more, but lives in the everlasting splendor of heavenly transfiguration, and with his Heavenly Father "inhabiteth

light inaccessible." (1 Tim. vi. 16.) All who loyally follow Him here below on the royal road of the cross, will walk with Him in heaven, in unchanging and everlasting light. Upon them will shine this everlasting light, God Himself.

Consequently, lights used in processions, devotions, at Church services, and during hours of prayer, fill a beautiful line of duty in their spheres.





CHAPTER IX

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF LIGHTS IN PROCESSIONS, DEVOTIONS, AND HOURS OF PRAYER IN THE CHURCHES

LIGHTS may be carried in every procession, but it is more becoming that this occur only in procession of the Blessed Sacrament, or at least with holy relics.

Of the many processions that occur during the year none carries with it such solemnity, and properly so, as that on Corpus Christi. For the Divine Savior who dwells all the year in the tabernacle under the appearance of bread is on this day given a royally triumphal march

by His faithful children. And, naturally, on this occasion the joy-giving candle must not be wanting. Neither is the number of candles determined, nor any fixed number that may not be increased, but it is the desire of Holy Church, that all who walk in the procession, clerics and the laity, bear white wax candles in their hands. And to preclude the failing of any one light, four candles are carried upon elongated candlesticks, on each side of the canopy.

It is not difficult to understand the significance of candles in a Corpus Christi procession. They are, without any doubt, a proof of deep respect, a sign of living faith, of love and gratitude, toward this most holy sacrament. They give expression of the joy with which the faithful participate in the triumphal march of our Divine Lord. And, indeed, how greatly they should rejoice! They see with living eyes what the Prophet Isaias saw but in

spirit, when in holy ecstasy he said: "I will not rest till her just one come forth as brightness, and her Savior be lighted as a lamp." (Is. lx. 1.)

As the candles in the Corpus Christi procession remind us of our Lord, the true light, so, in the procession of Candlemas Day, do they undoubtedly suggest to us, Christ, the light of the world. We realize this from the hymn that is repeated during the distribution of candles, preceding the procession: "A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke ii. 32.) These are the words which were spoken by the aged Simeon when he took the Divine Child into his arms. After the procession Holy Mass is offered, and the Church directs that burning candles be held during the gospel, and from the consecration to the communion. In the gospel our Lord meets us as the light of the world, and from the consecration to communion, particu-

larly, as the life of the world. St. Bernard gives these candles an ideal significance when on this feast-day he addresses the members of his community in these words: "See, my brethren, the burning candle in the hands of Simeon. Light your candles therefore from his light, the lamps, I say, which the Lord desires to see in your hands. Approach Him and be enlightened, that you may, not so much bear lights, as to be lights that luminate, both inwardly and outwardly, yourselves and your neighbor. Let them be a light in the hand, in the heart, and in your speech. The light in the heart be a light to yourselves; the light in the hand a lamp to your neighbor, and so too the light in your speech. The light in the heart be the sincerity of your faith; the light in your hand be the example in your labors, the light in your speech be your edifying conversation."

In addition we refer here also to pro-

cessions with candles, not prescribed by the Church, but which owe their observance rather to a personal devotion of the faithful. These occur mostly among visitors to the larger shrines of pilgrimages. The lights are to remind the pilgrims of the words of our Lord: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. v. 16.) Our life here on earth is as a pilgrimage toward heaven, toward our last goal, — to God. Of Him St. John says: "In Him was life and the life was the light of men." (John i. 5.) If, therefore, the pilgrim would reach God, who is light, then must he do here below the works of light, good works, and avoid the works of darkness, — he must avoid sin.

The light used devotionally is likewise rich in beautiful ideals. In these they are idealistic of the three divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity. As light illumines

the eye, that it may know created things, so faith illumines our understanding that it may know God and the revealed truths. And as the flame of the light points upward so does Christian hope raise our thoughts and will, our desires and our wishes, to God and to heavenly possessions. And finally, as the fire of the candle neither lingers nor rests, until it is consumed for the honor and glory of God, so burns in the heart that loves God a holy fire that gives it neither rest nor peace, but encourages it onward, to labor and to abide, to battle and to suffer, that it may subject to its service all the energies of body and soul.

Full of meaning too are candles in devotional exercises.

What devotions are to the faithful, so are the ecclesiastical hours of prayer to the priest. These give praise and worship to God as servants of Holy Church, by her command and in her name. Like to a

wreath the ecclesiastical prayer-hours gather about the Holy Mass, the center of our worship of God. As Holy Mass is celebrated mid the splendor of lights, so there burn during the ecclesiastical hours of prayer two, four, or six candles upon the altar. They too are symbols of the worship, praise, and thanksgiving which are offered to God in the recitation of the Psalms. In the celebration of a saint's festival day they exemplify especially the labors of the saint, who by his holy life, by word and deed, was in fact a light in the darkness of this world. "You are the light of the world" (Matt. v. 14), said our Lord to His apostles. These words are applicable, in a measure, to all the saints.

In the office of Holy Week, during the recitation of the holy office of matins (*tenebræ*), candles have an especial symbolic significance. Fifteen candles are lighted upon a triangular candlestick. These are extinguished gradually, except

one, which is carried to the rear of the altar, placed in hiding, so that darkness ensues. It is soon brought forward and placed upon the altar, to lighten the exit from the sanctuary. There is an important significance at the bottom of these ceremonies. The extinguishing of these candles reminds us how the disciples abandoned the Lord on the day of His sufferings, and how at His death even the sun was darkened. The last candle, however, which is hidden, lighted, behind the altar, is symbolic of Christ, who though He died in the body and thus seemed to the Jews to be extinguished, lived, however, in His divinity. He remained but a short time in the grave. In a glorious manner He came from out His tomb, that like a brightly shining light He might be to us in our departure from this world, through the dark portals of the grave, a guiding light in the bright hope of a glorious resurrection.

As the extinguishing of the candles during the tenebræ point to the death of our Divine Savior, so does the lighting of the candles on Holy Saturday idealize His resurrection.





CHAPTER X

THE SYMBOLISM OF CANDLES ON HOLY SATURDAY. THE EASTER CANDLE

THE first Church ceremony that takes place on Holy Saturday is the blessing of fire. According to the prescribed law of the Church, this fire must be started from a flint, and blessed outside the church building. From this fire a candle is lighted. Then there is handed to the deacon a triple candle. The deacon is vested in a white dalmatic, in remembrance of the angel clothed in a white garment at the grave of our Lord. The procession moves into the church. Upon entrance into the church, like to the place

where in the early Christian times the catechumens were located, who on this day through holy baptism became light in Christ, there is lighted for the deacon one candle of the three. This done he announces the joyful message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: "Lumen Christi," "Light of Christ," our Light, has risen. In joyful gratitude comes the response "Deo Gratias," "Thanks be to God." Again the procession moves. When reaching the center of the church, where from ancient times the faithful located, a second candle is lighted, and the deacon sings in a somewhat higher key than before, "Lumen Christi." For the third time the deacon announces this message of joy when he reaches the sanctuary, after the third taper of the triple candle has been lighted.

This striking ceremony beautifully portrays how the Divine Savior, after His resurrection, gradually revealed Himself,

first to Mary Magdalen, then to the pious women, and afterwards to the disciples and apostles.

The most picturesque symbol, however, of the risen Lord is the paschal or Easter candle, which is blessed immediately after the procession. This blessing consists in this: the deacon, or in his absence the priest, puts five blessed grains of incense into the Easter candle, and ignites it from the triple candle which was lighted from the newly blest fire. In the hymns which are intoned by the deacon, or priest, in the blessing of the paschal candle, attention is directed to the Divine Savior, who by His death on the cross destroyed the darkness of night, the night of sin, and merited for us the grace, sanctity, and childhood of God. This symbolic significance of the paschal candle is plainly indicated by the insertion into it of the five grains of incense in the form of a cross. These signify the five wounds that shone

upon the body of the risen Lord. Another important significance is attached to these five grains of incense by the pronouncement of the deacon in the words: "Accept, Heavenly Father, this offering of incense which in the solemn delivery of this candle Holy Church dedicates to Thee." In the Old Testament, according to God's ordinance, an offering of light and incense was made every evening in the temple of Jerusalem. (2 Moses xxx. 8.) According to the Holy Fathers of the Church this signalized Christ and His sacrifice upon the cross. The Easter candle is lighted by the deacon, and by its illumining flame is an ideal reference to the gloriously risen Savior, whilst at first it was a symbol of the Savior resting in His grave. This candle receives its light from the triple tapers, which is a figure of the Holy Trinity. At bottom of this edifying ceremony lies the idea that the resurrection of our Lord was accom-

plished by divine power. From the Easter candle, the sanctuary lamp and the candles on the altar receive their light. And in this respect also is this paschal light a striking symbol of the risen Savior, who by His resurrection gave incontrovertible proof that He is truly the light of the world.

In the benediction chants, the Easter candle is repeatedly designated as a pillar. As a type of the risen Lord it is a pillar of fire of the New Testament, which guides and lights them who pass through the waters of holy baptism. The lighted Easter candle is therefore idealistic in the procession in which it is carried to the baptismal font on Holy Saturday. In blessing the baptismal water it is partially sunk into the water, three times, each time deeper, and the priest at each dipping and at each time raising the keynote of his voice sings the words, "May the virtue of the Holy Ghost descend into all the

water of this font." In this ceremony we are again confronted by the paschal candle as a symbol of our Lord; as our Lord descended into the waters of the Jordan and thus sanctified them, so is this candle lowered into the baptismal water for its sanctification. And as the Holy Ghost hovered over Jesus, so is His power invoked upon the water. And as the Heavenly Father gave testimony of His Son, that in Him He was well pleased, so does He show His benign pleasure to all who are born again through the waters of baptism, children of God.

The paschal candle, after the procession, is placed upon a handsome pedestal, near the main altar, and is lighted at each solemn service. It should be a reminder to us during all the Easter season to turn our thoughts to the risen Savior. After the gospel on Ascension Thursday this candle is extinguished and taken from the sanctuary.

In the gospel of this feast is brought to our notice the ascension of our Lord into heaven, — His departure from earth. By the extinction of its light and the bearing away of the Easter candle, the importance of the feast-day is heightened in the expression given it, and here again is given to us the strong symbolic picture of the risen Lord.

There remains now for us to say something of the symbolic significance of the light in connection with holy relics, sacred pictures, and services for the dead.





CHAPTER XI

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF LIGHTS BEFORE HOLY RELICS, SACRED PICTURES, AND FUNERAL SERVICES

AT the consecration or blessing of an altar, relics of a martyr are enclosed in a specially prepared aperture. These are put in order for the occasion on the evening previous to their use, placed in position in a respectful locality, and a wax candle burns on each side all the night, until on the following morning they are borne to the place of permanent deposit. If holy relics are exposed for veneration, a lamp burns before them always, but upon the altar of exposition two candles are burning. This light is a tribute of respect to

the relics, and a joyful acknowledgment that the saint dwelt here upon earth as a child of light.

In like manner candles are burned before pictures or images of the Blessed Virgin and other saints. This is done to honor the Blessed Virgin and the saints. These lights remind us too that the Blessed Mother and the saints by their virtues and holy life became resplendent forecasts for our guidance.

Distinguished as well by a venerated custom through long ages, as by symbolic meaning, is the use of candles in funeral ceremonies. We noted in our outset that light was used on burial occasions in the earliest Christian times. Therefore suffice the following fact, stated by St. Jerome (died 420), that at the burial of St. Paula, bishops carried the funeral bier upon their shoulders, whilst other bishops preceded, bearing lamps and candles.

Even to-day it is customary in some

places that in funeral ceremonies wax candles, or one at least, is borne in the procession. It is a direction of the Church that at least one burning candle rest upon the coffined corpse. The deceased shall be hereby honored, because the corpse was a temple of the Holy Ghost. The burning lights are symbols of the earnest wish, hope, and prayers of the Church and the faithful, that God, for the Savior's sake, may grant the soul of the departed everlasting life, — that the soul may rest in Christ, “in the place of refreshment, light, and peace,” and that the body after its resurrection may share with the soul in splendor and glory for ever.







PART II

LIGHT AS A SACRAMENTAL

We have explained the sublime meaning of light. Yet the subject has by no means been exhausted. Holy Church places this in the order of a Sacramental; by her prayers they become sacred articles which bring to them that use them respectfully, and with believing devotion, many graces and blessings. In the following notes we will show what graces come to us through the use of blessed candles.



CHAPTER I

THE BLESSING OF CANDLES ON CANDLEMAS DAY AND DURING THE YEAR

THE Church blesses candles in a solemn manner on Candlemas Day. The priest wears, during this ceremony and during the procession, a cope of violet color. The occasion that gave rise to this procession were the bacchanalian feasts held by pagan Rome during the first days of February, in honor of their gods. In these festivities they marched in procession and carried burning candles and torches. Pope Gelasius I. (492–496) sought to offset these indecent heathen customs by opposing them with a Christian celebration in honor of our Lord. Quite appropriately this

holy Pope chose the second of February, because the mystery of this feast shows us how the aged Simeon praised the heavenly child as a light to illumine the Gentiles. The custom of this Christian procession with candles gradually spread to other countries. In the seventh century it became prevalent in Spain, and in the eighth century, in France and Germany. At that time, however, the blessing of candles did not yet take place. It is probable that this ceremony was not observed until the eleventh century. Holy Church blesses the candles with the further view, not only that they be used by the clergy and laity in processions, but also during the year in the services of the Church. At the blessing of candles the priest pronounces five prayers. In these the effects are prayed for which the Church seeks to obtain for them that carry the candles with a pious and believing disposition. We select from these

prayers the parts that express these effects.

In the first prayer the priest addresses himself to Almighty God in these words: "O Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God . . . we humbly beseech Thee that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bless and to sanctify these candles for the service of men, and for the health of bodies and souls, be they upon land or water, and wouldst hear from Thy holy heaven from the Throne of Thy Majesty the voice of this Thy people, who desire reverently to bear them in their hands, and to praise Thee in song; and wouldst show mercy to all that call upon Thee." In these words the effects of using the blessed candles are briefly stated. In the remaining four prayers some of the effects are expressed, but they are really only an explanation and an embellishment of the expression: "Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bless and to sanctify these candles for the health of

souls." Concerning the health of the body there are no further allusions made in these prayers. If we ask ourselves therefore, what benefits are to accrue to the body, we must in the first place think of the warding off of sickness, and precautions against whatever may lead to sickness, for instance the unwholesome influence of the elements (weather), deteriorated or impure food, and so forth. Likewise, and especially so, the many accidents which threaten life. To this, special reference is made in the prayer of benediction: "May these candles be blessed and sanctified for the services of men whether on land or water."

Then follows the second prayer: "Almighty, Everlasting God, . . . we humbly beseech Thy loving kindness that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bless, sanctify, and kindle with the light of Thy heavenly benediction these candles, that we, being worthy, be inflamed with the holy fire of

Thy sweetest charity, and may deserve to be presented in the holy temple of Thy glory." Again the Church asks in this prayer that God may bless and sanctify these candles. She then prays that He would accord to them that carry them these three favors:

First, that He make them worthy to offer these candles to Him, their Lord and God.

Second, that He may inflame them with the holy love of His sweetest charity.

Third, that they deserve to be presented in the holy temple of His glory to possess eternal salvation.

In the third prayer the Church addresses this prayer to the Divine Savior: "O Lord Jesus Christ . . . pour forth Thy blessing upon these candles, and sanctify them with the light of Thy grace; and mercifully grant that as these lights, enkindled with visible fire, dispel the darkness of night, so our hearts, illumined by invisible fire, that is, the brightness of the Holy

Ghost, may be free from the blindness of every vice; that, the eye of our minds being purified, we may discern those things which are pleasing to Thee and profitable to our salvation; so that, after the darksome perils of this world, we may be found worthy to arrive at the light that never faileth." The effects of grace for which Holy Church implores in this prayer can be summed in the following three words: Enlightenment, purity, and sanctity. The mind shall be enlightened by the grace of the Holy Ghost, that the believing Christian may understand the condition of his soul, and turn from sin with a firm resolution. He is, however, not to be content with this, but must by good works secure for himself God's pleasure, and thus make sure of the salvation of his immortal soul.

Then follows the fourth prayer: "Almighty, Everlasting God, . . . pour forth the grace of Thy blessing upon these candles; that as they afford us external

light, so by Thy bounty the light of Thy spirit may never be inwardly wanting to our minds." In this prayer, also, does the Church beg for the enlightenment of our soul through the Holy Ghost.

In the fifth and last prayer the Church addresses the following petition to our Divine Savior: "O Lord Jesus Christ . . . mercifully grant, that enlightened and taught by the light of the Holy Spirit we may truly acknowledge Thee, and faithfully love Thee." The important significance of the effect herein pleaded for, becomes plain upon reflecting that without a knowledge and love of God we cannot fulfil the destiny of our creation. When man acknowledges and loves God, he will also serve Him and thus gain eternal salvation.

If the priest blesses candles during the year for Church services, he uses the following prayer: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, we implore Thee to bless

these candles, and through the power of the holy cross to bestow upon them Thy heavenly benediction, Who has given them to mankind to dispel darkness, and may they, through the sign of the holy cross, obtain such blessing that wherever they be lighted, or wherever placed, the powers of darkness may vanish, trembling and affrighted, with all their aids and accomplices, and be driven from those dwellings, and never again dare disquiet or molest them that serve Thee, the Almighty God."

As we learn from these prayers, many graces are obtained for us through the blessed candle. All these have been merited for us by our Divine Savior through His many sufferings, and His death upon the cross. He made the Church the guardian of these treasures. When she therefore in the blessing of candles attaches such rich graces, she does so by looking to the merits of Jesus Christ, and by the power and authority she received from Christ.

Consequently we are indebted for the numerous effects of the blessed candles, above all to our Divine Savior, who merited these graces for us, and secondly to Holy Church who desires to apply them to us.

When we consider the significance of blessed candles, we cannot but admire the wisdom as well as the goodness and love of Holy Mother Church.

As it is a sign of her wisdom to give us to understand so many mysteries of holy faith through the symbol of light, so is it likewise a proof of her loving-kindness, that she has raised it to the dignity of a sacramental, in order to gain these many graces for the faithful. Elevating is the thought that the blessed candles upon the altar not only direct our attention continually toward our Lord, but they also, through the prayers and blessings of the Church, become to us a prayer, become as a fiery sword, before which "the princes of darkness trembling and affrighted, with all

their aids and accomplices, vanish, and not again attempt to disquiet or molest them that serve the Almighty God." The blessed candle in the hand of the first communicant has an important significance when we call to mind that in blessing it, Holy Church implores our Lord to "mercifully grant that enlightened and taught by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may truly acknowledge Thee, and faithfully love Thee." The Divine Savior asks this love from the first communicant, not such as quickly grows cold, but one that will endure for an entire lifetime.

And when the candidate for orders, bearing the blessed candle, approaches the altar, or the religious professing her vows offers her candle, their souls should realize the prayers of the blessing: "May we be worthy to offer these candles, Lord, our God, to be inflamed with the holy fire of Thy sweetest charity, and deserve to be presented in the holy temple of Thy glory."

And is it not the heart's desire and the appropriate prayer of the good mother, who makes her first appearance in the House of God, to receive the blessings of the Church?

And again! When the faithful carry the blessed candles in processions, and as with one mind pray to God with and for one another, the prayer of Holy Church is certainly as though spoken out of one heart and soul: "Mercifully grant that . . . our hearts, illumined by invisible fire, that is, the brightness of the Holy Ghost, may be free from the blindness of every vice; that the eye of our minds being purified, we may discern those things which are pleasing to Thee, and profitable to our salvation; so that after the darksome perils of this world, we may be found worthy to arrive at the light that never faileth."

"Consoling above all will the blessed candle be to the dying, when he knows that Holy Church in her blessing humbly

addresses our Heavenly Father that He may vouchsafe to bless and sanctify these candles for the service of men, and for the health of their bodies and souls, . . . and show mercy to all that call upon Him." And should the evil enemy come with temptations to him sick unto death, how comforting to him the thought that in the blessed candle he has an effective protection "before which the prince of darkness and all his helpers must fear and tremble, and take their flight." On whatever occasion the Catholic Christian may carry the blessed candle, he will look with anxious gratitude for the effect of this blessed light. This effect is what the Church implores from the Heavenly Father in the following words: "Graciously pour forth the grace of Thy blessing upon these candles; that as they afford us eternal light, so by Thy bounty the light of Thy Spirit may never be inwardly wanting to our minds." Not in vain does the holy apostle Paul ad-

monish the Thessalonians, and through them us also, "Extinguish not the Spirit" (1 Thess. v. 19), that is, place no hindrance to the Holy Ghost in yourselves, through sin, carelessness, or a disorderly life.





CHAPTER II

THE BLESSING OF CANDLES ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY BISHOP AND MARTYR ST. BLASE, AND ON THE FEAST OF ST. AGATHA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

It is customary almost everywhere to bless candles on the feast of St. Blase. In the prayers of this ceremony Holy Church first gives praise to the power and goodness of God, offers homage to the loyalty of the glorious martyr, then addresses herself to Almighty God in the following prayer: "Almighty and merciful God, we humbly beseech Thy divine majesty, look not upon our sins, but appeased by the merits and intercession of the glorious martyr and bishop Blase, bless and sanc-

tify in Thy most adorable mercy these wax candles, by pouring upon them Thy graces, in order that all in good faith, whose throat is touched by them, may, through the merits of His suffering, be freed from all ills of the throat, and in health and joy be grateful to Thee in Thy Holy Church, and ever praise Thy Holy Name.

When the priest thereupon blesses the throats of the faithful with the blessed candle, he pleads that the effects prayed for in the benediction ceremony of the candles may be applied. He uses the following words: "Through the intercession of the holy bishop and martyr Blase, may God free thee from all ills of the throat, and from every other evil. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

In many places it is customary to have candles blessed on the feast of St. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr. "Bless and sanctify," the Church pleads to God, "these candles,

and grant through the intercession of the virgin and martyr Agatha, that wherever they be lighted or placed against destroying flames, the fire may be controlled and completely extinguished." As is evident from these prayers, these blessed candles find devotional use against lightning and danger from fire.

CONCLUSION

IN taking a brief retrospect of what has been written we can but be strengthened in the thought that the light (candle) as a symbol and as a sacramental has an important significance. How seriously would the solemnity of divine service be curtailed if the charming illumination of lighting failed! We are accustomed to see the altar glittering with lights during Holy Mass, or when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for adoration. We are therefore not always as conscious as we might be, how of advantage the burning lights affect our

ideas and the disposition of our soul, and in how much they aid us joyfully and cheerfully to praise and glorify God, to thank Him, and to implore His aid. May we never forget the deep significance of these candles! They will be to us as a book of prayers, because they speak to us of the beauty of God, of Christ's continual sacrificial love, of the Blessed Virgin and the saints, speaking to us and admonishing us to follow their example in the way of the light, and to accomplish works of light. As the light by its natural qualifications expels darkness and illuminates, so has the Church attached to blessed candles a like but supernatural effect. The blessed candles shall dispel the powers of darkness, and obtain for us the grace that the "light of the Holy Spirit may never be inwardly wanting" and that "by the grace of the Holy Ghost we may be free from the blindness of every vice; that, the eye of our minds being puri-

fied, we may discern those things which are pleasing to Thee and profitable to our salvation; so that, after the darksome perils of this world, we may be found worthy to arrive at the light that never faileth."



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